

Fort Christiansvaern
At waterfront at foot of Company Street
Christiansted National Historic Site
Christiansted
St. Croix
Virgin Islands

HABS No. VI-5

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

HABS
VI
1-CHRIS,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FORT CHRISTIANSVAERN

HABS No. V1-5

HABS
VI
1-CHRIS
4-

Address: At waterfront at foot of Company Street, Christiansted National Historic Site, Christiansted, St. Croix, Virgin Islands.

Present Owner: Government of the Virgin Islands.

Present Occupant: National Park Service.

Present Use: Historic site, open to visitors.

Statement of Significance: The plan of the fort is typical of a four-pointed citadel of the 17th and early 18th centuries. It consists of four one-story curtain walls built around a near square court, projecting bastions in each corner and a ravelin protecting the entry to the fort. In spite of many additions and alterations, Fort Christiansvaern still preserves its original layout and much of its 18th century character. Of the five preserved Danish forts in the West Indies and the Western Hemisphere it is the most characteristic of its period. Although much of the present fabric of the structure dates from its founding period, its original finishes and building fittings have been largely obliterated by continuous maintenance and repair. It contains, however, some 18th century and a great deal of early 19th century building details, hardware, fittings, etc.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners:

Danish West India and Guinea Company, 1738-54
Danish State, 1754-1917
Virgin Islands Insular Government, 1917 to present.

2. Date of erection: Begun in 1738. Main features of existing fort proper completed in 1749. West yard between west and north bastions added in 1836. Second story of east bastion added in 1836. Stable yard east of fort proper added in 1837.

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

FORT CHRISTIANSVAERN
HABS No. VI-5 (Page 2)

3. Architect: None. For contributors to the design, see under notes.
4. Builders, suppliers: Danish West India Company and Danish State. See notes below.
5. Notes on original construction'

As early as 1726 officials of the royally chartered Danish West India and Guinea Company proposed the purchase of the abandoned French Island of St. Croix for the expansion of their colony in St. Thomas and St. John. The purchase was ratified in June 1733 and the official transfer took place in June of 1735.

The first Danish colonizing expedition lead by Frederik Moth landed at the site of the former settlement of Bassin the present Christiansted, in September of 1734. The construction of a temporary fortification was immediately begun on the remains of the earlier French fort. It consisted of an earthwork 100 x 116 feet with several small structures along one side for housing the Governor of the new colony, Frederik Moth and the garrison of the fort. The fortification was considered only as an interim shelter until a permanent fort could be built. The size and location of the permanent fort was to be decided upon by Governor Moth and the military engineers sent out by the Danish West India and Guinea Company. Three in succession arrived in St. Croix and died shortly afterwards. Lt. Stahlmann 1734, Lt. Warneck, 1735-36 and Engineer Carl August Stall, 1737-38. None of them reached agreement with the Governor on the plans for the permanent fortifications of Christiansted harbor, and the more ambitious plans of the Governor were not approved by the company directors in Copenhagen.

Consequently, following the severe hurricane of August 29-30, 1738 that partly demolished the temporary fort, Governor Moth started the construction with company slaves and soldiers of the existing structure within the confines of the earlier earthwork. The work was carried on under him and his successors until 1749 when the fort proper in general outline had arrived at its present form. In an evaluation report to the Danish West India and Guinea Company from 1743 the

FORT CHRISTIANSTVAERN
HABS No. VI-5 (Page 3)

fort is valued at 43,555-2-3 Rigsdaler. It consisted of a northeast curtain facing the harbor supporting a water battery, two one-story curtains supporting gundecks toward the northwest and southeast respectively, a two-story curtain with a masonry gallery and Italian stairway towards the central court, towards the southwest four one-story bastions in the salient angles supporting gun decks and a ravelin on the landside in front of the southwest curtain. During part of the construction period Johan Wilhelm Schopen served as construction supervisor. Schopen among other activities acted as a land surveyor for the infant colony. He appears to have had some knowledge or training of architecture and construction and his private residence of a slightly later date became the nucleus of the present Government House in Christiansted.

6. Notes on alterations and additions

The fort has been in constant use since its erection and there have been numerous changes and alterations. Most have been minor and have not affected the appearance greatly. The changes with their dates of completion are listed below:

- 1755-67 Flat brick roof on southeast curtain replaced by mansard roof.
- 1774-78 Mansard roof of southeast curtain damaged in September 1, 1772 hurricane, is replaced by flat brick roof. Interior of curtain refinished. Northeast curtain raised and a vaulted powder magazine constructed below the gun deck. Interior of west bastion altered from beam supported gun deck to vault-supported deck.
- Building Inspector, Julius von Rohr prepared the drawings and supervised the construction.
- 1780 Interior of south bastion altered from beam supports of gun deck to brick vault supports.
- 1786-87 A one-story privy of vaulted masonry construction was built in corner of north bastion and water battery to replace privy destroyed in hurricane of August 27, 1785.
- 1795 Wooden cannon shed built in ravelin against south wall.

FORT CHRISTIANSVAERN
HABS No. VI-5 (Page 4)

- 1802-7 Privy enlarged, towards the north. Kitchen chimney constructed over west bastion. Interior of southwest curtain refinished.
- 1817-21 Brick pavements and floors were relayed in the courtyard and the bastions. The two existing staircases from the courtyard to the battery atop the northeast curtain were constructed. Several doors and shutters in the southwest curtain were replaced. The courtyard side of the southeast curtain was rebuilt.
- 1826 The vaulting of the ravelin cell was replaced by the existing flat roof.

In 1835 the fort was inspected by Governor General von Scholten; Building Inspector Hinkelberg subsequently submitted estimates for several additions to fort, which were approved by von Scholten and executed the following years.

- 1835 The present prison yard on the west side of the fort was added.
- 1836 Present second story built atop of bastion, and shed added on court side of southeast curtain.
- 1837 The stable yard on east side of fort was constructed on existing south 70' of stable and the carriage house, west side of gate, dates from this year.
- The existing wrought iron scrolls over the sally port and the entrance gate to the powder magazine were installed.
- 1839 The existing fanlights and jalousie windows of the southwest curtain of second floor were installed.
- 1841 Stable extended 25' to the north and a wash-house (now demolished) was built over the water at edge of beach. Stable extended 21' to the north.

- 1846 Wooden cannon shed in ravelin yard was replaced by a brick shed with sheet metal roofing.
- 1857 The flat brick roof of the two-story southwest curtain was replaced by a hipped roof with sheet metal roofing.
- July
15, 1878 The fort became Police Station and Courthouse. Sections of the fort were still retained for use by the military.
- 1903 Door was cut in outer wall of northwest curtain to make access to prison yard from courtyard of fort.
- 1911 The flat brick roof on beams of the northwest curtain was partially replaced by a reinforced concrete slab and beams.
- About 1935 The washhouse in stableyard was demolished and the paneling and wallpapering of the second story rooms of the southwest curtain were removed.

B. Historical Events Connected with Structure

Fort Christiansvaern during the early years of its existence housed the governor, the government offices, the Lutheran ministers and place of worship, the court rooms as well as the military of St. Croix. As the colony prospered, the various religious and government functions moved to more appropriate quarters. The fort, remained however the military headquarters of the island up until 1878 when it became the police headquarters. Although the most noteworthy event to take place on the site of the fort was the official transfer of the island from French to Danish hands prior to the construction of the existing building, the fort has played a continuous and important role in the daily life of the Danish colony and, after 1917, the U. S. possession.

C. Important Old Views

Fort Christiansvaern, Christiansted, St. Croix, by Jens Friis, 1741. In the Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Denmark.

FORT CHRISTIANSVAERN
HABS No. VI-5 (Page 6)

Plan of Christiansted's Wharf Area by Peter Lotharius Oxholm, 1779. In Kortsamling 337C, Plan IIIa, Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Plan of Fort Christiansvaern, Christiansted, St. Croix, by Peter L. Oxholm, 1779. In Kortsamling 337C, Plan IIIb, Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Facade and Cross Section of Fort Christiansvaern, Christiansted, St. Croix, by Peter L. Oxholm, 1779. In Kortsamling 337C, Plan IIIc, Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Drawing of Wharf Area, Christiansted, St. Croix, by an unknown artist, c. 1800. In the Handels-og Søfartsmuseet paa Kronborg, Helsingør, Denmark.

Drawing of Fort Christiansvaern, Christiansted, St. Croix, by P. Beck, July 1816. In Kortsamling 337 A, Vestindien I, No. 7, Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Painting, Christiansted, St. Croix, by H. P. Thorsøe, c. 1825. In the Handels-og Søfartsmuseet paa Kronborg, Helsingør, Denmark.

Lithograph, Christiansted, St. Croix, of original drawing by Theodore C. Sabroe, 1835. In the Handels-og Søfartsmuseet paa Kronborg, Helsingør, Denmark.

Plan of Fort Christiansvaern, Christiansted, St. Croix, by First Lieutenant V. Giellerup and Second Lieutenant V. Friis, March 1836. In the Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Drawing, Christiansted, St. Croix, by A. May from the original by W. Melbye, c. 1855. In the Handels-og Søfartsmuseet paa Kronborg, Helsingør, Denmark.

Lithograph, Christiansted, St. Croix, from the original drawing by P. Seidelin, c. 1860. In the Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark.

D. Sources of Information

Unpublished

Olsen, Herbert E. Historic Structures Report, Part I, Fort Christiansvaern, Christiansted, St. Croix, U. S. Virgin

Islands, Christiansted National Historic Site. Unpublished report prepared by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, August 1960. This illustrated report of 168 pages was based on a detailed study of the original records of the Colonial Government of the former Danish West Indies on deposit in the Danish and United States National Archives, and is the most complete treatment of the history of Fort Christiansvaern available.

Published sources

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Brønsted, Johannes (ed.). Vore Gamle Tropekolonier. Vol. II: Dansk Vestindien. Copenhagen: Westermann, 1953.

Hvass, Tyge. Dansk Vestindien. Vol. VI: Aeldre Nordisk Architektur. (Mogens Clemmensen (ed.). Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1925.

Larsen, Kay. Dansk Vestindien, 1666-1917. Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1928.

Westergaard, Waldemar. The Danish West Indies under Company Rule (1671-1754), With a Supplementary Chapter, 1755-1917. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The fort is a small 18th century citadel comprised of four bastions at the salient angles, a ravelin, vaulted chambers, cells, a magazine, a dungeon, the old Commandants quarters on the second floor of the southwest curtain, and a horse yard to the southeast. It was begun in 1738 on an older fort site following the Danish colonization in 1734. The Fort proper varies only in detail from the standard pattern of smaller 18th century fortifications. There are several 19th century additions, but the general character of the fort is preserved.

FORT CHRISTIANSVAERN
HABS No. VI-5 (Page 8)

2. Condition of fabric: In general, the fabric is in fair condition. Some wooden floors and rafters are infested with termites and sections of the masonry walls are scaled and pitted. The wooden frames of the windows and doors are in poor condition.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: One and two stories; built on three levels. Brick and rubble masonry. Measures 210 by 220' including horse yard.
2. Foundations: A dungeon under the west bastion is the only area of the Fort with a floor level below ground. Exposed foundations are found along the southeast side and the south side of the ravelin. Masonry gutters line the walls on three sides of the main court, one side of the ravelin and in front of the stables.
3. Wall construction: The Fort is a rubble and brick masonry structure, presumably with earth and rubble fill between outer shell walls. The bastions and the northeast or sea battery have brick vaults supporting the gun deck. The remaining masonry roofs are supported on timber. The brick used is a hard yellow brick of superior quality covered inside and out with 1/2" to 1" of stucco except in the vaulted chambers below the bastions which have been whitewashed, and in the interior rooms which have been plastered. The thickness of the walls varies from 1' to 16' but in general measures 2' to 3'. The stucco has deteriorated and is scaled and pitted in many places. Exterior cornices and other masonry decorations are formed in brick and stuccoed. The interior walls and partitions are of masonry generally, but some are wooden; half timber walls occur in the southwest wing.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The entrance gates to the ravelin and to the horse yard are flanked by quoined masonry posts. The exterior face of the sally port is pedimented and flanked by fluted pilasters, and the interior face has a surround of projecting quoins. All other door openings are plain. Except for the entrance gates all

openings are spanned by brick arches. There are five types of exterior doors:

Heavy lapped plank construction with sheet metal coverings (with or without lookout opening).

Two layers of boards nailed together crosswise.

Board doors with style and rail braces simulating paneling.

True panel door (with or without jalousies in top panel).

Wooden grill doors.

- b. Windows, shutters and battlements: Window openings on the ravelin side of the southwest curtain have band surrounds. On the court side of the curtain the piers between the windows have capital and base moldings. All other window openings are plain. They are headed by flat brick arches and on the second floor of court side of southwest curtain by round arches over glazed fanlights. Following types of windows occur:

Glazed casement sash.

Glazed double-hung windows, six lights over six

Double casement jalousies

Wrought iron bars and grills

All windows, except those towards the courtyard, are furnished with shutters of a double plank or paneled construction.

In addition to window openings there are gun slits and vent openings with iron bars and in some cases metal doors. In the stable area window openings towards the exterior are equipped with wooden grills.

The bastions have parapet battlements and the ravelin and prison yard have tapered gun slits.

5. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof over the bastions, the sea battery, and the two side wings is a flat brick deck with parapet walls on both the out-facing side and the inner side. The second story southwest curtain has a hipped roof of crimped and corrugated sheet metal on wooden sheathing and wooden trusses. Corrugated metal roofing also occur, over the guard house, two shed roofs on the southeast wing, the wooden shed in the horse yard, and the parts of the stable where the original flat brick roof has been replaced. The carriage house in the horse yard has a flat brick roof.
- b. Cornice and eaves: The southwest wing has a brick and stuccoed cornice on all four sides. All the parapet walls have an overhanging lip on the outside face. The corrugated metal roofs have only a slight overhang. The southwest or main wing has gutters at both ends with metal leaders which are encased in the masonry walls below the deck floor. On the east bastion the gutter is behind the parapet and the leader enters the floor in a like manner.

6. Chimneys: There is one chimney on the west bastion over the kitchen. The hearth below is a brick platform with a small oven.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: The fort is entered from the land side by a wooden gate through the ravelin. The ravelin is a walled triangular court with a guard house at the southwest point and a gun shed along the south side between the guard house and the south bastion. The sally port is located in the center of the southwest curtain of the fort and leads from the ravelin into the square central court.

The two-story southwest curtain has a gallery on the court side on both floors. The first floor has two

FORT CHRISTIANSTVAERN
HABS No. VI-5 (Page 11)

rooms on either side of the sally port. The second floor has five rooms in a row. The second floor is reached by an exterior staircase in the court. The southeast curtain has a cistern room and four connected rooms in a row. A passage between the cistern room and the south bastion gives access to the horse yard.

The northeast curtain contains a powder magazine of three-by-three vaulted bays. Two exterior staircases lead from the court to the gundeck on top of the curtain. The northwest curtain contains a kitchen, a cistern and five cells (access from the courtyard). The four bastions have vaulted chambers on the ground floor. Access to the dungeon in the west bastion is by a flight of steps and a trap door. The east bastion has a second story on the level of the gundeck.

A latrine extends north from the west bastion to the water's edge--access is through a passage between the northeast curtain and the north bastion. A walled prison yard is located outside the northwest curtain between and the west and the north bastions--access is through the kitchen in the northwest curtain.

The horse yard on the southeast side of the fort is entered directly through a cast iron gate on the land side or through the fort by two flights of steps and a passageway in the southeast curtain.

The horse yard contains arcaded stables along the south side of the yard, a carriage house west of the gate and a modern wooden shed built against the retaining wall of the fort.

2. Stairways: Two large stairways in the court flank the sallyport and lead to the gallery above. A secondary stair is to the northwest of these steps. Two flights lead from the main court to the sea battery on the north and east corners of the court. Two flights of steps lead down to the horse yard from the terrace outside of the southeast wing. All steps are of brick with stuccoed balustrades.
3. Flooring: On the first floor most areas are paved with brick or with stone blocks roughly one foot square. The landings on the main stairways and the gallery have 9" by 9" hard clay tile. In many of the rooms the brick

has been covered with concrete. Some rooms have wooden floors presumably over older masonry finishes. The southeast wing now has wooden flooring, as do most of the rooms in the southwest wing. The northwest wing has concrete floors. The powder magazine has a pegged wooden floor over masonry. The second floor east bastion has concrete over brick. The north and west bastion chambers and the dungeon all have concrete floors. The south bastion chamber has a wooden floor over brick. The stable has a brick pavement; the carriage house has a wooden floor. The second floor of the southwest curtain has wooden flooring. In the ravelin the shed has a concrete floor and the guardhouse a wooden one.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: All masonry walls are stuccoed or plastered and painted. The wooden partitions are painted. Ceilings in the southeast, southwest and northwest wings are either bricks on purlins and beams, or wooden sheathing on beams. The rooms within the bastions and sea battery have brick vaulting. The stable and the building in the horse yard have brick on beams. The second floor rooms have wooden tray or flat hung wooden ceilings.

5. Doors: The interior doors are of two main types:

Double board construction.

Paneled doors (with or without jalousies in top panel).

6. Trim: Decorative trim is limited to the second floor of the southwest curtain and to the first floor of the southeast curtain.

In the southwest curtain the trim consists of wooden cornices and ceiling trim. The southeast curtain has wooden ceiling trim, baseboards; the north room has paneled wainscoating.

7. Hardware: The hardware appears to date from all periods of the building's use. It consists of wrought iron H, L, strap and scroll hinges, hasps, hooks, spring and drop latches and sliding surface bolts. There are wooden and metal box locks with brass and porcelain door handles and spring locks. The gateway to the ravelin has a wrought iron scroll incorporating the insignia of Frederik VI and the date 1836. A second wrought iron scroll occurs over the piers in front

FORT CHRISTIANSVAERN
HABS No. VI-5 (Page 13)

of the powder magazine. Other items are a wrought iron lantern bracket above the sally port, cast iron bell hood and brackets in ravelin, a cast iron gate in the horse yard. Remains of a wrought iron bell pull and hanger, iron grills, window bars, spikes, etc.

8. Lighting: The fort is wired for electricity.

9. Heating: None

- D. Site: The Fort is a series of one-room-deep wings grouped in the shape of a small square citadel, with bastions at the salient angles, a ravelin with sally port on the land side and a horse yard with stables on the southeast. The main axis runs north-northeast with the ravelin guard house pointing south-southwest. The Fort is constructed in three levels and located in the northeast corner of the Virgin Islands National Historic Site (since 1961, Christiansted National Historic Site) on the waterfront. From bastion to bastion it measures 130' by 130'. Its north-east side faces the harbor which it controls in connection with the batteries on Protestant Cay and Fort Lousia Augusta on the point northeast of Christiansted. The fort is free-standing on the water's edge on the east side of the Hamilton Jackson Park at the waterfront of Christiansted harbor.

Prepared by Frederik C. Gjessing, Architect
National Park Service
July 1960.

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

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Fort Christiansvaern (Christiansted
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Company St. Vic.
Christiansted
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PHOTOGRAPHS